



# *“We’re a natural wine producer rooted in the East Sussex countryside”*

## **WINEMAKER BEN WALGATE**

**H**idden away down the winding lanes of the East Sussex countryside, you will find Tillingham. A mixed farm dating from the 13th century, it is now home to vineyards, fruit trees, ancient woodland and livestock. In a unique position nestled among 70 acres of rolling hills and woodlands, it has far-reaching views along the Tillingham river valley to the Cinque Port town of Rye, as well as Romney Marsh and the sea. And it's here that you'll find farmer and winemaker Ben Walgate.

His effervescent passion for natural and biodynamic wine is contagious, and the recently renovated hotel, bar and restaurant he has created are a draw for visitors, too.

‘The initial idea to create this winery came 20 years ago,’ says Ben, who spent his formative years on his father’s North Lincolnshire farm and, later, working in wine bars owned by his mother. Both experiences shaped Ben’s future path in life. After university, he travelled to France and spent time in the vineyards and wineries there, where he came to realise that having his own vineyard was a dream he wanted to

pursue. He went on to train in viticulture at Plumpton College, before setting about restoring a vineyard on the Isle of Wight. Soon after, he started working as a winemaker and then became CEO of world-class Kent wine producer Gusbourne Estate (a position he went on to hold for six years). ‘It was during my time working at Gusbourne that I was introduced to the landowner Terence Devonport,’ says Ben, ‘and the plan for Tillingham’s regeneration was set in motion.’

So much about what Ben is doing at Tillingham is different, inspiring and original. He’s not following a tried-and-tested approach with either farming or winemaking; instead, he is going his own way and following his own beliefs. ‘I have planted all the vines biodynamically and organically, as I firmly believe this is the future for growing grapes,’ says Ben. His approach both in the vineyard and winery is, by his own admission, ‘experimental’ to the point where fellow winemakers have called him the ‘Willy Wonka of winemaking’ – an apt description of his avant-garde style. He was the first English winemaker to import ancient >

Ben believes biodynamic,  
organic grapes are the  
future of winemaking



## *What I love most...*

“SLIPPING ON SOME WELLIES AND MY KNACKERED BARBOUR JACKET AND JUST GOING FOR A STROLL THROUGH THE FARM WITH MY KIDS AND THEM RUNNING AMOK IS JUST THE BEST FEELING”

terracotta urns – known as qvevris – from Georgia into the UK to make his wines in. It is the semi-porous nature of qvevris, as well as the thermal performance that comes from them being buried in the ground, that means the wines made in them are unique.

Now, Ben produces around 20 different wines – a mix of red, white, orange rosé and several styles of sparkling. Each wine is different, but all of them have a depth of flavour and an energy that make them taste distinctly ‘Tillingham’.

When asked to describe the day-to-day running of Tillingham, Ben explains that

‘every day is completely different. Right now, the vineyard is coming into production for the first time. Plus, we’re beginning global wine distribution, the restaurant is finding its feet, and there’s also so much to do with offering overnight accommodation and tours for visitors. It’s challenging work at times, but also incredibly fun.’

The fun aspect is crucial in this early stage of business as setting up a winery certainly isn’t for the faint-hearted. ‘Starting a vineyard from scratch is a capital intensive project,’ says Ben. ‘It takes three years for the vines to come into maturity. You’re burning cash through those three years with no income.’ So how did Ben manage? ‘Serendipitously,’ he says. ‘It turns out there’s a demand for rooms, a restaurant and tourism in the area. Customers also want to buy our wines directly from us, which is really cash generative with a good margin.’ It is these more instantly lucrative elements of the business that have helped support the slower growth of both the vineyard and the farming business.

This is meant to be Tillingham’s first summer of trading in the restaurant and 11-roomed hotel, and their own grapes will soon be ripe and ready for harvest. There are 21 varieties planted at Tillingham, 10 of which are set to ripen for the first time in 2020, and the rest in 2021. Ben has chosen a mixture of French and German varieties, with some experimental picks, such as Mazoni Bianco and Bastarda, too. ‘There will be a big step up this year, when we go from being 100 per cent reliant on buying fruit from other vineyards to make our wines with, to having our first Tillingham Domaine wines. I can’t wait.’

By taking risks and pioneering a different approach to both winemaking and farming, Ben is realising his dream of owning a vineyard that has ‘a respect for nature and the environment at its heart.’ We’ll toast to that.

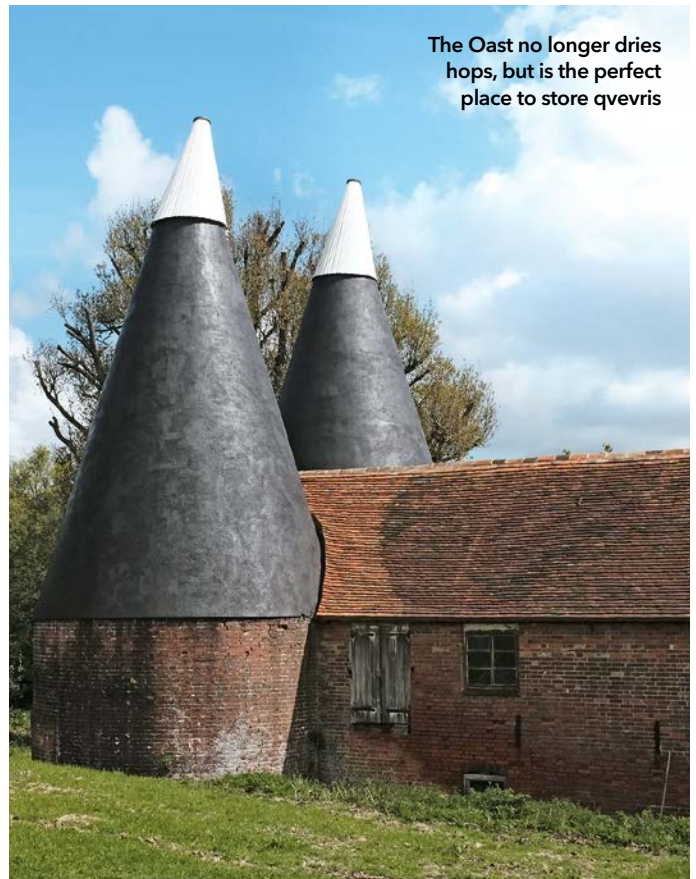
**tillingham.com @Tillingham**







The first Tillingham grapes will be ready this summer



The Oast no longer dries hops, but is the perfect place to store qvevris



Ben imported his qvevris from Georgia





Visitors are able to tour the beautiful vineyards, dine in the restaurant and stay overnight in the hotel

## ON MY DOORSTEP...

***Visit...*** 'Pett Level beach. I love sea swimming and have always lived near the coast. I feel a magnetic pull to the sea and it's just there on my doorstep.'

***Go for a meal at...*** 'St Leonards has a great street food vibe. With the family, I go to Halfman Halfburger ([halfmanhalfburger.com](http://halfmanhalfburger.com)) in Marine Court or Tommy's Pizzeria on Norman Road ([tommyspizzeria.co.uk](http://tommyspizzeria.co.uk)).'

***Shop at...*** 'Adams in Rye ([adamsofrye.co.uk](http://adamsofrye.co.uk)) on the High Street. It's a proper "old school" toy shop upstairs with a newsagents on the ground floor. When I take the kids they each get to choose something... with no arguments at all!'

SMALL  
BUSINESS  
ADVICEHOW IGTV CAN PROMOTE  
YOUR BUSINESS

WHY USING THIS VIDEO APP CAN BRING YOUR BRAND TO LIFE



In 2018, Instagram launched its own standalone video-based app called Instagram TV (or IGTV). On this social platform, you can share vertical videos that last between 15 seconds and 60 minutes. The great thing about IGTV is the visual storytelling aspect, along with its informal and playful format. You can offer your audience something fresh and different - sneak previews or short tours are particularly popular. 'Our video wine reviews have worked well for us,' says Ben, 'especially when we have a new release. We also did mini virtual tours and showed our audience around the bar, tasting room, restaurant and hotel rooms when they first opened.'

**PLAN IGTV INTO YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY** Video has proven to be one of the most popular forms of content out there and, as visual beings, we find it a memorable and enjoyable medium to watch. So, rather than it being simply a nice option for your business, it should be a key part of your marketing strategy going forward. There are so many forms it can take and so many uses it can have - from live-stream video to vlogs, interviews, customer

testimonials, tutorials, webinars and presentations - the list goes on and on.

**THINK ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE**

'Every business has a different audience so the most important thing when you're starting out is to make sure that the content you are creating is what your audience wants to see,' says Rosie Clark, social media consultant at Coastal Social. 'Testing out different types of material and alternating the length of your videos is key to finding the magic time frame and topics of interest for your unique following.' For Ben, IGTV has definitely proved valuable to his business. 'At first, I was nervous about doing IGTV because it's just me in front of a camera doing all of the talking! But, the feedback on the videos has made it worth it - it's great when I bump into someone and they say, "We just love the IGTV content - it's brilliant." That shows it's worthwhile.'

**HOW TO DO IGTV** First, plan and shoot your video, then make any necessary edits. Once you're happy with the result, upload the video to IGTV directly from your phone, or schedule it to go live later (not forgetting to share a preview

to your Instagram grid). Write a caption that will optimise the content and remember to add relevant hashtags. Try to post your video at a time when a lot of your audience is likely to be online - at lunchtime, for example. You can also reshare the video content through Instagram Stories in the following weeks to encourage more video views.

**LOOK AT THE ANALYTICS** 'So much can be learned from the analytics,' says Rosie. 'Go to "View Insights" to see the engagement your video has had, as well as its audience retention, which shows the percentage of your video viewed by your audience.' Once you've filmed three or four videos, you can get a good understanding of what's working and what's not. 'Be consistent with your offering, just as you would when posting images on Instagram, and stick to your schedule, whether that's once a week, bi-monthly or daily for bigger brands. Your followers will start to expect and look forward to your videos, and that's what it's all about,' says Rosie.

**To learn more about how social media could help your business, head to [coastalsocial.co.uk](http://coastalsocial.co.uk) or email your questions to [rosie@coastalsocial.co.uk](mailto:rosie@coastalsocial.co.uk)**

*The one lesson I've learnt...*

“YOU CAN NEVER BE TOO GOOD  
A LISTENER”